

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 SAJ-01 ACDA-05 CIAE-00 PM-03

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 /065 W

----- 075035

R 071100Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5477

INFO CINCLANT

COMICEDEFOR

CNO WASHDC

SECDEF WASHDC

USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI

AMEMBASSY LISON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

C O N F I D E N T I A L REYKJAVIK 0764

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MARR IC PFOR

SUBJECT: COMMENTS ON EUGENE ROSTOW'S ATA SPEECH IN ICELAND AND
THE TIMINN EDITORIAL

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REF: (A) REYKJAVIK 0749 (B) REYKJAVIK 0761

1. PRIME MINISTER GEIR HALLGRIMSSON, WHO IS PROBABLY THE STAUCHEST DEFENDER IN ICELAND OF NATO AND OF THE ICELAND DEFENSE FORCE, AND WHO IS SOMEWHAT OF A "COLD WAR" WARRIOR HIMSELF, REMARKED TO ME ON JULY 4 THAT ROSTOW'S STATEMENTS AT THE ATA DINNER (REFTEL A) WERE "PROBABLY TOO STRONG FOR THE OCCASION AND THE AUDIENCE." HE "REGRETTED" ROSTOW'S REFERENCE TO ICELAND AND SAID THAT THE ICELAND REFERENCE AND THE TIMINN EDITORIAL (REFTEL B) WILL CAUSE HIM SOME PERSONAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS WHICH HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO AVOID. HE ALSO COMMENTED THAT EQUATING THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY WITH THE COMMUNISTS (WHEN IT LED THE LEFTIST GOVERNMENT OF 1971-74 AND WHICH IS NOW IN COALITION WITH HIS INDEPENDENCE PARTY) WILL ADD TO THE STRAIN WHICH IS ALREADY DEVELOPING IN THE COALITION. HE CALLED THORARINSSON'S EDITORIAL VICIOUS AND IRRESPONSIBLE.

2. FONMIN EINAR AGUSTSSON (PROGRESSIVE PARTY) WENT TO GREAT LENGTHS JULY 4 TO "ABSOLVE" ME AND MY EMBASSY OF FALSE REPORTING. HE REMARKED THAT THORARINSSON HAS NEVER QUESTIONED MY "INTEGRITY AND INTENTIONS" BUT THAT THORARINSSON DISLIKES THE STATE DEPT. AND FEELS SOMEONE THERE "OR IN WASHINGTON" MUST BE TRYING TO MAKE TROUBLE FOR ICELAND BY DELIBERATE DISTORTION. I TOLD THE FONMIN THAT EXPLANATION WAS INCREDIBLE AND THE EDITORIAL A BUNCH OF NONSENSE. I ALSO REMARKED THAT THE TIMINN EDITORIAL LEADS ME TO THE OPPOSITE CONCLUSION THAN THAT REACHED BY THORARINSSON, NAMELY THAT ROSTOW'S COMMENT ON ICELAND'S CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT SHOWS THAT HE HAS HAD NO CONTACT WITH WASHINGTON. ALSO THAT I FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO THINK THORARINSSON REALLY BELIEVES WHAT HE WROTE SINCE HE PRIDES HIMSELF ON BEING AN AVID READER OF EVERYTHING THAT GOES ON IN THE USA, ADMIRES THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, THE FREEDOM OF INDIVIDUALS TO EXPRESS THEIR OWN FEELINGS, AND CONSIDERS HIMSELF AN EXPERT ON USA POLITICS. IT WAS OBVIOUS IN OUR CONVERSATION THAT THE FONMIN FEELS ROSTOW DID NOT ENHANCE US-ICELAND OR NATO-ICELAND RELATIONS.

3. SOVIET AMBASSADOR FARAFONOV, ALSO AT THE JULY 4 RECEPTION, ASKED ME WHETHER ROSTOW'S SPEECH SIGNED A NEW OFFICIAL HARD LINE ON THE PART OF THE USG WITH REGARD TO THE USSR. I TRIED TO EXPLAIN TO HIM THAT ROSTOW WAS A PRIVATE CITIZEN AND IN NO WAY ASSOCIATED WITH THE USG, ETC. I ALSO MADE AN EFFORT TO EXPLAIN THE ATA TO CONFIDENTIAL

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HIM. FARAFONOV, WHO HAS BEEN PROMINENTLY FEATURED IN THE INDEPENDENCE PARTY PRESS (AND BARRON'S BOOK) AS A KGB AGENT, ALWAYS IMAGINES ALL SORTS OF PLOTS AROUND HIM. A COUPLE OF DAYS EARLIER, HE TOLD THE SWISS AMBASSADOR THAT "UNFRIENDLY FORCES IN THE USA" WERE TRYING WRECK THE CSCE AND DETENTE.

4. AMONG THE POLITICIANS AT THE JULY 4TH RECEPTION THE TIMINN EDITORIAL WAS A PRINCIPAL TOPIC OF CONVERSATION. MOST FELT

THORARINSSON PURPOSELY TIMED THE RELEASE FOR AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE DAY. A GROUP OF PROGRESSIVE PARTY MEMBERS, INCLUDING A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, SAW IN THIS EDITORIAL THORARINSSON'S "MISGUIDED" EFFORTS TO "CORRECT THE BALANCE" IN THE PARTY. THEY SAID THAT THORARINSSON CONSIDERS HIMSELF THE FATHER OF THE LEFTIST GOVERNMENT AND LOOKS FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN ANOTHER LEFT COALITION HEADED BY HIS PARTY WILL LEAD THE GOVERNMENT. OF LATE HE HAS REPORTEDLY DETECTED A SWING WITHIN HIS PARTY TOWARD THE "RIGHT," AND HAS SEIZED ON THE ROSTOW SPEECH AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN HIS OWN OBJECTIVES. THIS GROUP, ALTHOUGH FEELING THAT THE TIMINN ARTICLE WAS UNJUST, NEVERTHELESS WAS CONCERNED THAT ROSTOW'S SPEECH AND PARTICULARLY HIS REFERENCE TO ICELAND WILL MAKE THEIR POSITION WITHIN THE PARTY "A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE." I URGED THEM TO FIGHT BACK.

5. OF GREATEST IMMEDIATE CONCERN TO ME IS THE REACTION OF PROGRESSIVE PARTY CHAIRMAN OLAFUR JOHANNESSEN, WHO WAS PRIME MINISTER IN THE LEFTIST GOVERNMENT OF 1971-74 AND WHO IS CURRENTLY MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND JUSTICE. IT WAS LARGELY THROUGH HIS PERSONAL EFFORT THE COMMUNISTS WERE KEPT IN CHECK ON THE DEFENSE ISSUE DURING HIS ADMINISTRATION. JOHANNESSEN LONGS TO REGAIN THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP BUT WOULD NOT INTENTIONALLY TRY TO BREAK UP THE PRESENT COALITION UNLESS HE THOUGHT HE WAS BEING TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF. HE IS A RESPONSIBLE STATESMAN AND A MAN OF INTEGRITY, BUT HE IS ALSO A SENSITIVE PERSON WITH WHOM I HAVE A FINE PERSONAL AS WELL AS PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR FUTURE US-ICELAND RELATIONS THAT WE CONTINUE TO KEEP HIS FRIENDSHIP. HE HAS BEEN ABSENT FROM REYKJAVIK THESE PAST FEW DAYS, BUT I EXPECT TO SEE HIM LATER THIS WEEK. SPECULATION IS THAT ALTHOUGH HE WILL READILY REALIZE THAT ROSTOW WAS SPEAKING NOT AS A USG OFFICIAL, HE NEVERTHELESS MAY NOT BE ABLE TO IGNORE THORARINSSON'S EDITORIAL.

6. EMBASSY COMMENT: GIVEN A LITTLE TIME, I AM CONFIDENT WE CAN
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CALM THE SITUATION AND RESTORE PERSPECTIVE. THORARINSSON DEPARTED FOR HIS ANNUAL VISIT TO EAST GERMANY ON JULY 3. I SHALL SEEK TO HAVE A DISCUSSION WITH HIM ON HIS RETURN. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT HE BE SET STRAIGHT, NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE OF THE POTENTIAL DAMAGE HE COULD CAUSE OUR DEFENSE RELATIONS, BUT BECAUSE OF THE POSTURE HE IS LIABLE TO TAKE BY ASSOCIATION ON UNGA ISSUES IF HE, IN FACT, BELIEVES HIS OWN EDITORIAL. HE SETS ICELAND'S UN POLICIES. I DOUBT THAT THE FRIENDS OF THE US AND NATO IN ICELAND WILL WELCOME A RETURN VISIT OF ROSTOW IN THE NEAR FUTURE. HE UNFORTUNATELY MISJUDGED THE AUDIENCE. HE IS SCHEDULED TO RETURN NEXT JUNE WHEN ICELAND PLAYS HOST TO THE ANNUAL ATA CONVENTION (JUNE 10-16). 350-500 DELEGATES FROM NATO COUNTRIES ARE EXPECTED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, SPEECHES, REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975REYKJA00764
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750233-0998
From: REYKJAVIK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750781/aaaactww.tel
Line Count: 167
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 REYKJAVIK 0749, 75 REYKJAVIK 0761
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 APR 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <24 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: COMMENTS ON EUGENE ROSTOW'S ATA SPEECH IN ICELAND AND THE TIMINN EDITORIAL
TAGS: MARR, PFOR, IC, ATA, (ROSTOW, EUGENE), (HALLGRIMSSON, GEIR)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006